

Dear Sen. Moore, Sen. Lesser, Rep. Khan, Rep. Luxenberg and members of the Housing Committee,

I am writing to express my strong support for Senate Bill 4 - An Act Concerning Connecticut's Present and Future Housing Needs. It will protect renters and make housing more affordable, safe and comfortable.

According to the National Low Income Housing Coalition, Connecticut lacks about 85,400 units of housing that are affordable and available to its lowest-income renters. This is a scandal. Without romanticizing the past, I'm old enough to remember when, even though many people were poor, most could still afford some kind of housing, including SROs for single people. Homeless people on street corners, or pushing shopping carts full of their worldly possessions down sidewalks, were not common sights. Homelessness creates huge mental and physical health problems, including for children. Additionally, rents and evictions have steadily risen in the state over the past year, forcing many Black and Brown people, and other low-income renters, into homelessness. The cost of housing is pricing out renters and potential owners, increasing housing instability and decreasing equity, as more people of color cannot afford to buy homes to build generational wealth.

It is unfortunate and unfair that those who could benefit most from energy efficiency measures – low-income renters who often suffer from health problems already and are then exposed to excessive cold, heat, drafts and toxic emissions in their homes – are the least likely to benefit from such programs because of the pre-existing conditions in their dwellings. Section 21 of the bill would address this problem, creating greater equity and environmental justice along with housing justice.

The benefits of this bill are vast and far-reaching. By reducing energy costs through energy efficiency and improved housing, tenants in low-income and Environmental Justice communities will be able to save money on monthly utility bills and maintenance costs, which have been skyrocketing and disproportionately harming these same neighborhoods. Moreover, the installation of solar, and other clean energy systems will increase the resilience of these communities in the face of extreme weather events, leaving them better prepared for the future. Prioritizing the removal of common health hazards, such as gas leaks, mold, vermiculite, asbestos, lead, and radon, will improve indoor air quality and reduce pollution from inefficient housing.

This bill will also create job opportunities for thousands of Connecticut residents who will be trained and placed in clean energy jobs, including some of the very people most impacted by poor housing, if my friend Leticia Colón de Mejías has anything to say about it. By prioritizing equity in community engagement and relationship building, we can ensure that marginalized communities of color are at the forefront of solving the climate crisis and beneficiaries of the clean energy transition we are creating here in Connecticut.

With all the federal dollars pouring into our state, this is the time to make meaningful investments in energy efficiency and clean renewables. Some of our residents who stand to gain the most are also our frontline, essential workers, who could surely use a break.

Sincerely,

*Melinda Tuhus*

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